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Increased financing to aid harness image

Another step in improving the image of harness racing was taken Tuesday when more than 50 board directors of the United States Trotting Association met in Columbus and approved added financing for the North American Harness Racing Marketing Association.

NAHRMA, based in New York and founded as the sport's marketing arm in 1986, will be aided through a formula structured to net the promotion agency \$350,000 a year through 1990.

Harness racetracks, which are not obligated to join NAHRMA, will be assessed fees prorated on their mutuel handles, similar to "piggy-back" taxes. Funding also will come from increases in the cost of licenses and fees at member tracks with owners, drivers and trainers included in the raises. Also, one-half percent will be collected from the income at each yearling horse sale.

"I think it was a wise decision (by the USTA) and a necessary one," said Tom Aldrich, Northfield's general manager. "We have been a voluntary member of NAHRMA and will continue our support. Now with firm funding, (NAHRMA) can go after major advertisers and pursue bigger avenues such as bringing more harness racing to television. Professional representation such as this benefits the industry in general down the line."

■ Northfield recently was called the "fastest-growing racetrack in the United States" by Eugene Christiansen, head of Christiansen/Cummings, a national gaming consultants firm. A guest speaker

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at the Harness Tracks of America Inc. convention this month in Phoenix, Ariz., Christiansen cited his survey showing Northfield's 55% increase in handle and 49% hike in attendance the past three years.

■ Northfield returns to its nights-only schedule with 7:30 racing March 30, March 31, April 1 (Good Friday) and April 2. March 31 marks the only Thursday program of the year. Afternoon programs end March 27 at 1:30. They'll resume Dec. 14.

■ Oney Time, a 4-year-old gelding by Noble Knight Time, might be one of the winningest horses in North America, but he ranks second to Royal Performer in the Royal Wire Pacing Series here. Oney (driver Don McKirgan) has won nine of his last 11 starts, but only one in the series. Royal Performer (Lanny Merriman), a 4-year-old gelding by Abercrombie, has won three of nine with two coming in the RWP series. Point-leaders Glory Monger (Joe Adamsky) and Miss Judy Comfort (Keith Kash) will continue their rivalry in the counterpart Royal Wire Trotting Series this afternoon. Royal Wire finals are March 31 for pacers and April 4 for trotters.

■ Another "Must-Win" Tri-Super jackpot will be distributed today. The last three "must" situations have produced winners out of patrons with fewer than the usual seven correct horses — first three in fourth race, first four in sixth — on their exotic wager tickets.

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